

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06  
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FRB-03 STR-07 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /096 W  
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R 151809Z FEB 78  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3195  
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
USMISSION USNATO  
AMCONSUL BELFAST  
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LONDON 02634

USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK  
SUBJECT: THE CONSERVATIVES: LOOKING FOR A STRATEGY

SUMMARY: CONVINCED THAT 1978 IS AN ELECTION YEAR,  
THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS ATTEMPTING TO PUT TOGETHER  
A NEW ELECTORAL STRATEGY. THE ECONOMIC ISSUES THAT  
HAVE STOOD THE TORIES IN GOOD STEAD FOR THE LAST  
THREE YEARS HAVE LOST THEIR IMPACT AS THE LABOR  
GOVERNMENT HAS SUCCESSFULLY DRAWN BRITAIN OUT OF ITS  
FINANCIAL SLOUGH. WITH PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN  
NOW DOMINATING THE CENTER OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM,  
MRS. THATCHER HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED TO MOVE HER  
PARTY FURTHER TO THE RIGHT. HER RECENT CONTROVERSIAL  
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STATEMENTS ON IMMIGRATION, WHILE STRAINING TORY UNITY,  
SEEM TO HAVE AT LEAST TEMPORARILY PAID OFF IN THE  
OPINION POLLS AND ARE THE MOST DRAMATIC EXAMPLE OF THIS  
RIGHTWARD BENT. BUT RECENT TORY THINKING ON NORTHERN  
IRELAND, DEVOLUTION AND A NUMBER OF OTHER IMPORTANT  
POLITICAL ISSUES ALSO REFLECTS THIS TREND. AS THE  
REVISED CONCEPT OF A CONSERVATIVE STRATEGY CONTINUES

TO UNFOLD, WE EXPECT THE TONE OF POLITICAL DEBATE  
LEADING UP TO THE ELECTION TO BECOME INCREASINGLY  
HARSH. END SUMMARY

1. CONSERVATIVES EXPECT AN ELECTION IN THE AUTUMN  
OF THIS YEAR AND REGARD THE TEST AS CRUCIAL FOR  
BRITAIN AND THE PARTY. MANY ARGUE THAT THE BENEFITS  
OF THE NORTH SEA OIL BONANZA WILL ASSURE THAT WHICH-  
EVER PARTY WINS THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION WILL CON-  
TINUE TO DOMINATE BRITISH POLITICS FOR THE NEXT  
DECADE. SUCH A PROLONGED PERIOD IN OPPOSITION WOULD  
BE DAMAGING FOR THE LABOR PARTY; IT WOULD BE DISASTROUS  
FOR THE CONSERVATIVES. THIS PARTY, ONCE SO ACCUSTOMED  
TO GOVERNMENT, HAS HELD OFFICE FOR ONLY THREE-AND-A-  
HALF OF THE LAST FOURTEEN YEARS. TORIES FACE THE  
DANGER OF BECOMING THE NATURAL PARTY OF OPPOSITION.

2. SIX MONTHS AGO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ELECTORAL  
FAILURE SEEMED MERELY THEORETICAL TO MOST CONSERVATIVES.  
A TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT LEAD IN THE POLLS ALMOST  
GUARANTEED VICTORY. BUT THE RECENT REVERSAL OF  
BRITAIN'S FINANCIAL MISFORTUNES, THE DECLINE OF IN-  
FLATION, THE SUCCESS OF  
AND THE SKILLFUL LEADERSHIP OF JIM CALLAGHAN HAVE  
CHANGED ALL THIS. CONSERVATIVES NOW HAVE TO RUN  
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HARD JUST TO KEEP UP WITH THE GOVERNMENT. THE  
MOOD OF THE PARTY IS NOT DESPERATE, BUT THE EBULLIENT  
CONFIDENCE OF LAST YEAR IS DISSIPATED, AND THERE IS  
A PERCEPTIBLE WEAKENING OF THE KNEES.

3. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF JANUARY IT HAS BECOME  
INCREASINGLY APPARENT THAT THE TORIES, TROUBLED BY  
THE EROSION OF THEIR COMMANDING LEAD, ARE SEEKING A  
NEW STRATEGY TO FIX THE ATTENTION OF THE VOTERS.  
THE FORMER SINGLE-MINDED STRATEGY, WHICH WORKED SO  
WELL, HAD ATTACKED THE LABOR GOVERNMENT AS ECONOMICALLY  
IRRESPONSIBLE, SPENDING TOO MUCH, TAXING TOO MUCH, THE  
CAPTIVE OF THE TRADE UNIONS AND SOCIALIST DOGMA,  
HOPELESSLY ENSNARED IN A SPIRAL OF INFLATION AND  
UNEMPLOYMENT. IF TORY REMEDIES WERE NOT ALWAYS  
CONVINCING, THEY AT LEAST OFFERED ANOTHER APPROACH  
TO PROBLEMS WHICH SEEMED TO MANY TO BE BEYOND THE  
CONTROL OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. MARGARET THATCHER,

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R 151809Z FEB 78  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
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INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 04 LONDON 02634

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (FIRST LINE OF TEXT ADDED)

WHEN EXTOLLING THE MERITS OF FREE ENTERPRISE, INCENTIVES, PROFITS, LOWER TAXES, AND SMALL BUSINESS WAS AT HER MOST ARTICULATE AND PERSUASIVE. TO MANY, SHE SEEMED THE NATURAL POLITICAL EXPRESSION OF NATURAL ECONOMIC LAWS. THE TORIES, AIDED BY LABOR'S UNCERTAIN RESPONSE TO A BLEAK ECONOMY, COULD MAKE A CONVINCING CASE AGAINST GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC OPINION APPROVED. BUT WITH THE STRINGENT PROGRAM OF THE IMF, THE NEW REVENUES FROM THE NORTH SEA, AND BRITAIN'S FINANCIAL RECOVERY, THE NATION'S ECONOMIC PICTURE HAS NOW BRIGHTENED. TORY CRITICISMS, NOT TO MENTION TORY ALTERNATIVES, HAVE LOST THEIR SHARPNESS AND IMPACT. THE ISSUES ON WHICH THE PARTY FOR THREE YEARS HAD PLANNED TO MOUNT ITS ELECTORAL  
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CAMPAIGN SEEM TO HAVE PEAKED. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

HAS BEEN RENEWED IN LABOR'S CAPACITY TO MANAGE THE ECONOMY, AND CONSERVATIVES ATTRACTIVENESS HAS ACCORDINGLY DECLINED. JIM CALLAGHAN COULD CLAIM HE HAS ALREADY DONE MUCH OF WHAT MARGARET THATCHER SAID SHE WAS GOING TO DO.

4. THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE NOT ABANDONED THEIR ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS--DECLINING RATE OF INFLATION STILL MEANS RISING PRICES, UNEMPLOYMENT STANDS AT A MILLION AND A HALF, AND BRITAIN'S PRODUCTIVITY REMAINS ABYSMALLY POOR. BUT SINCE THE NEW YEAR, MRS. THATCHER'S ADVISERS, INCLUDING HER ECONOMIC MENTOR KEITH JOSEPH, HAVE URGED THAT ECONOMICS ALONE WILL NO LONGER CAPTURE THE IMAGINATION OF THE VOTER AND THAT THE BASE OF CONSERVATIVE APPEAL MUST BE BROADENED. THATCHER AND HER CLOSE COLLEAGUES HAVE THEREFORE SOUGHT OTHER, MAINLY POLITICAL, ISSUES FOUNDED ON THE PREMISE THAT IF CALLAGHAN AND LABOR NOW HOLD THE CENTER, THEN TORIES MUST INEVITABLY MOVE TO THE RIGHT. THESE NEW LINES OF CONSERVATIVE POLICY HAVE NOT EMERGED WITH CLARITY, NOR WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE PARTY AS A WHOLE. EMOTIONAL CONTENT IS HIGH AND SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES ARE VAGUE, BUT THE RIGHTWARD DRIFT IS UNMISTAKABLE.

5. THE MOST STRIKING EXAMPLE OF THIS MOVE INTO NEW POLITICAL TERRITORY CAME IN A JANUARY 30 TELEVISION INTERVIEW WHEN MRS. THATCHER INJECTED THE QUESTION OF IMMIGRATION INTO BRITAIN'S POLITICAL DEBATE. ASKED ABOUT CUTBACKS IN IMMIGRATION NUMBERS, THE CONSERVATIVE LEADER REPLIED THAT THE BRITISH PUBLIC IS, "AFRAID THAT THIS COUNTRY MIGHT BE RATHER CONFIDENTIAL

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SWAMPED BY PEOPLE WITH A DIFFERENT CULTURE AND, YOU KNOW, THE BRITISH CHARACTER HAS DONE SO MUCH FOR LAW AND DONE SO MUCH THROUGHOUT THE WORLD THAT IF THERE IS ANY FEAR THAT IT MIGHT BE SWAMPED, PEOPLE ARE GOING TO REACT AND BE RATHER HOSTILE TO THOSE COMING IN." MRS. THATCHER DID NOT SAY HOW SHE PROPOSED TO "END IMMIGRATION AS WE KNOW IT," AND NO SUBSTANTIAL CUTBACK ON THE CURRENT ANNUAL LEVEL OF 28,000 NON-WHITE IMMIGRANTS IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT RENEGING ON PREVIOUS BIPARTISAN COMMITMENTS (PARTICULARLY TO UK PASSPORT HOLDERS FROM EAST AFRICA AND TO DEPENDENTS OF IMMIGRANTS ALREADY RESIDENT HERE). BUT HOWEVER IMPRECISELY, MRS. THATCHER LINKED TORYISM WITH ANTI-IMMIGRATION IN THE PUBLIC MIND.

6. MUCH OF THE RESPECTABLE PRESS, ALL OF THE LABOR

PARTY AND, PRIVATELY, MOST OF THE LIBERAL WING OF THE CONSERVATIVES CRITICIZED MRS. THATCHER NOT ONLY FOR FAILING TO OFFER ANY WORKABLE SOLUTIONS BUT FOR USING IMMIGRATION AS A EUPHEMISM FOR RACIALISM AND THEREBY PLAYING ON THE VAGUE ANXIETIES AND HOSTILITIES OF THE BRITISH PUBLIC. WHILE INSISTING THAT SHE MERELY WISHED THE SUBJECT OPENLY DEBATED RATHER THAN SUPPRESSED, MRS. THATCHER TO SOME APPEARED TO BE COURTING THE VOTE OF THE NATIONAL FRONT. WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE, MUCH LESS THE CONSENT, OF MOST OF HER SHADOW CABINET COLLEAGUES, THE CONSERVATIVE LEADER SEEMED TO HOLD UP THE SPECTRE OF POWELLISM BY AMBIGUOUSLY IMPLYING THAT THE COUNTRY'S 3.3 PERCENT NON-WHITE POPULATION IS SOMEHOW A THREAT TO THE FABRIC OF BRITISH SOCIETY.

7. IN ADDRESSING IMMIGRATION, MARGARET THATCHER RUNS THE RISK OF POLITICAL EMBARRASSMENT BY HAVING LITTLE PRACTICAL TO OFFER IN THE WAY OF REDUCING NUMBERS. SHE ALSO RUNS THE RISK OF ALIENATING

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SOME OF THE CONSERVATIVE-MINDED INTELLIGENTSIA WHO BELIEVE THEY GLIMPSED IN HER REMARKS A DARK SHADOW

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FRB-03 STR-07 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /096 W  
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R 151809Z FEB 78  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3197  
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS  
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AMEMBASSY ROME  
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OF DEMAGOGUERY. MOST IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, A SERIOUS EFFORT BY MRS. THATCHER TO ABANDON EARLIER COMMITMENTS ON IMMIGRATION WOULD PROVOKE A CRISIS OF LIBERAL OPPOSITION WITHIN HER OWN PARTY. TED HEATH PUBLICLY CONTRADICTED THATCHER BY CLAIMING HIS OWN IMMIGRATION ACT OF 1971 OFFERED ALL THE PROTECTION AND FLEXIBILITY NEEDED. ANOTHER CONSERVATIVE OUTCAST, PETER WALKER, PUBLICLY DISSENTED FROM THE LEADERSHIP BY INSISTING THAT TORIES CONSTRUCTIVELY ADDRESS THE REAL PROBLEM OF RACE RELATIONS, NOT THE RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT NUMBERS GAME OF IMMIGRATION. THE UNHAPPINESS OF SOME OF MRS. THATCHER'S FRONTBENCH COLLEAGUES SUCH AS WILLIE WHITELAW, JIM PRIOR, AND IAN GILMOUR HAS BEEN MORE MUTED BUT NO LESS SERIOUS. CONFIDENTIAL

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IF MRS. THATCHER IS INDEED SET ON A RESTRUCTURING OF BRITISH IMMIGRATION POLICY, SHE WILL HAVE TO DO SO AT THE SACRIFICE OF WHAT HAS BEEN HER MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION AS CONSERVATIVE LEADER: PARTY UNITY. SHE MAY YET IGNORE THIS CONSTRAINT; A POLL TAKEN JUST AFTER THE TELEVISION INTERVIEW AND PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 13 IN THE "DAILY MAIL" SHOWED A CONSERVATIVE JUMP TO AN ELEVEN PERCENT LEAD OVER LABOR.

8. WHILE IMMIGRATION HAS BEEN THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL EXAMPLE OF THE TORY SEARCH FOR A NEW STRATEGY, IT IS NOT ISOLATED. RECENT REMARKS ON NORTHERN IRELAND BY SHADOW SPOKESMAN AIREY NEAVE SEEM TO QUESTION THE LONG ESTABLISHED BIPARTISAN POLICY IN ULSTER. WHEN NEAVE SAID THAT POWERSHARING WAS "NO LONGER PRACTICAL POLITICS," HE TOO FAILED TO SUGGEST AN ALTERNATIVE, AND THIS OMISSION HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS A TORY TILT TO THE PROTESTANT MAJORITY. MOREOVER, THE CONSERVATIVES SUPPORTED ULSTER UNIONIST OBJECTIONS TO PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION FOR THE PROVINCE IN ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (PR WOULD GIVE THE CATHOLIC VOTE AT

LEAST THE OPPORTUNITY OF SECURING ONE OF THE THREE EUROPEAN SEATS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND). THIS SORT OF COOPERATION HOLDS OUT THE PROSPECT OF REVIVING A USEFUL TORY-UNIONIST PARLIAMENTARY ALLIANCE BUT AT THE COST OF A BROAD-BASED WHITEHALL POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND.

9. DEVOLUTION, TOO, HAS BEEN CAUGHT IN THE RIGHTWARD FLOW OF CONSERVATIVE STRATEGY. NEVER VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF AN ASSEMBLY FOR  
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SCOTLAND, TORIES INCLUDING SHADOW SPOKESMAN FRANCIS PYM NOW SPEAK PRIVATELY OF OPPOSING THE GOVERNMENT'S BILL IN THE SCOTTISH REFERENDUM. CALCULATING THAT THE PARTY HAS FEW VOTES LEFT TO LOSE ON THE ISSUE IN SCOTLAND, CONSERVATIVES WELCOMED THE RECENT CRIPPLING AMENDMENTS TO THE BILL WHICH REQUIRE APPROVAL BY AT LEAST 40 PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN SCOTLAND AND GIVE THE SHETLAND AND ORKNEY ISLANDS THE RIGHT TO REJECT A REFERENDUM DECISION WHICH FAVORS DEVOLUTION FOR MAINLAND SCOTLAND.

10. FURTHER INSTANCES OF CONSERVATIVE RIGHTWARD MOVEMENT BEFORE THE ELECTIONS ARE IN THE OFFING. FREE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AS A POLITICAL STATEMENT, IS INTENDED TO SEPARATE THE PRACTICAL UNION MEMBER FROM HIS "RADICAL" UNION

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AMEMBASSY ROME  
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LEADERSHIP. WE WILL HEAR MORE OF THE THEME THAT  
A LABOR VICTORY AT THE NEXT ELECTION WILL PERMIT  
THAT PARTY TO THROW OFF ITS DISGUISE OF SOCIAL  
DEMOCRATIC MODERATION AND PLUNGE THE NATION INTO AN  
ORGY OF SOCIALIST SELF-INDULGENCE. THE SPREADING  
DISENCHANTMENT OF THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP WITH  
THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF EUROPEANISM MAY FIND VOICE.  
AND AN INTERNAL SETTLEMENT IN RHODESIA IS ALMOST  
CERTAIN TO RECEIVE TORY ENDORSEMENT WHILE LABOR IS  
PAINTED AS SELLING OUT TO "TERRORISTS" AND "COMMUNISTS."

11. WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF IMMIGRATION, NONE  
OF THESE ISSUES ALONE WILL SWAY LARGE NUMBERS OF  
VOTERS. BUT AS A COLLECTION, THEY ARE LIKELY TO  
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CREATE A CHARGED POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN THE MONTHS  
AHEAD. THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP OF TONE IF NOT SUB-  
STANCE IN THE ISSUES OF IMMIGRATION, LAW AND ORDER,  
AND RHODESIA. ASKED ABOUT THE EMERGING STRATEGY,  
ONE CONSERVATIVE COMMENTED THAT MRS. THATCHER HAD  
DECIDED THAT THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH THE CALLAGHAN  
GOVERNMENT IS, "KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK." IT APPEARS  
THAT MRS. THATCHER HAS ALREADY STARTED THE KNOCKING.  
AND ON THE BASIS OF THE FIRST FEW WEEKS OF THE YEAR,  
IT APPEARS THAT AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN BRITAIN  
WILL BE DIVISIVE, BRUTAL, AND BITTER.

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## Message Attributes

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**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Draft Date:** 15 feb 1978  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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